

Transcription: Hale Burr

Today is Wednesday, May 4th, 2011. My name is James Crabtree, and this morning I'll be interviewing General Hale Burr. This interview is being conducted by telephone. I'm at the General Land Office Building in Austin, Texas, and General Burr is at his home in Plano, Texas. This interview is being conducted in support of the Texas Veterans Land Board Voices of Veterans Oral History Program. Sir, thank you very much for taking the time to talk to us today. It's an honor for us.

Hale Burr: Well I'm glad that I have this opportunity.

Yes sir. Sir, I guess the best question I pretty much always start off with in these interviews is just tell us a little bit about your childhood and your life before you entered the military.

Hale Burr: OK, I was born in the middle of World War II in 1943 in Kingsville, Texas. My dad was working for the Missouri Pacific Railroad during that time, during the war, and it was a critical occupation so he was exempt from the draft, and we moved around quite a bit in Texas and Louisiana until I was about 4 years old and we settled in my mother's home town of Vidor, Texas. I went to school with the same kids from Grades 1 through 12 in that small town, but while I was a child I was fascinated by airplanes and aviation in general, and I used to make a lot of balsa wood and plastic models and hang up these fighter aircraft and display them in my room.

Did you know sir then at that point that going into the military and Air Force in particular was something you wanted to do?

Hale Burr: No, it was an evolving process, but by the time I graduated from high school I had decided to attend Texas A&M University, and at that time, A&M was an all male and all military school, so I was in the Cadet Corps for four years and wore a uniform every day and marched to meals and got exposed to a military regiment and lifestyle and I really enjoyed the discipline and the teamwork and the loyalty and relationships I formed in the Cadet Corps. I was in the Air Force Reserve Officer training corps program there, and was qualified to become a pilot, and so upon graduation, I was commissioned and entered pilot training.

Tell us about that, sir, where did they send you and what are your memories of pilot training?

Hale Burr: I was sent to Laredo Air Force Base, Texas. It was one of the most intense years of my life because the days were long. Usually the normal program was about a half a day spent on flying and about a half a day on academics and physical training, plus there were not only flying examinations but there were all kind of academic examinations and we had to stay up late at night and study, and my wife was particularly helpful in helping me study and learn all my emergency procedures for the airplanes I was flying in pilot training. So it was a very intense year, but I enjoyed it. It was a lot of fun and when I graduated, I was ranked number 5 out of 68 students that started. In those days, the way you got your follow-on assignment was according to your class rank, and I selected to fly the F-4 fighters.

Was that a relatively new aircraft at that time, sir?

Hale Burr: Yes, it was brand new. The F-4 only became operational in about 1963 or '64 in the Air Force, and so I got into flying the first F-4's in 1966, and they were C models.

Tell us a little bit to back up, with training, you spent an entire year there at the Air Force Base in Laredo learning about flight training. Perhaps, sir, you can walk us through a little bit of what that's like, kind of the steps along the way, because I think a lot of us have heard the stories of how many people wash out, that the training is really rigorous.

Hale Burr: Yes, that's a fair statement. I did not come from an economic or social background that allowed me to ever fly an airplane when I was growing up as a child and as a teenager, and so my first flight was in a Cessna 172 at Texas A&M in what was called the flight indoctrination program that they conducted for ROTC students, and we only got about 15 or 20 hours maybe, but we got to solo in the airplane and got to fly across country, so we got some taste of what flying was like. Then when I went to Laredo Air Force Base, we started out in a small twin engine jet called the T-37, and flew that for six months, and then we graduated to a little bit larger twin engine jet which was supersonic, capable of supersonic flight, called the T-38, and I would say that about half of the class washed out that started for various reasons. Some of them developed a fear of flying and we had what we called self initiated elimination, SIE, and at any time you decided you didn't want to fly, you were shown the door and went to someplace else in the Air Force to complete your obligations.

Did you ever, sir, have any fears or anxiety during your training that for whatever reason you weren't going to measure up, or were you always pretty confident throughout?

Hale Burr: No, I was always confident and I never had any anxieties or fear about flying. In fact, just the opposite. I thrived on it and looked forward to flying as much as possible every day. But other people washed out for academic reasons. You had to learn everything from aerodynamics to weather phenomenology and all about engines and flight characteristics, and on and on and on. So it was a very intense academic program and some people didn't make the grade there and they were eliminated for academic reasons.

What was it like the first time you were actually able to fly a jet solo?

Hale Burr: Oh, it was a big thrill. You have a program you follow, and you have to go through each flight and they are progressive in nature, and you eventually reach a point that if you're progressing normally, your instructor pilot will tell you well, today is the day you are going to solo. And we went out to a small auxiliary field maybe within 40 or 50 miles of Laredo where we used to practice our landings and approaches, and we landed and he got out of the airplane and I closed the canopy and I took off and flew in the pattern and made several touch and go's and then I landed and he got back in and then we flew back to Laredo from the auxiliary field, so it was a big thrill.

When you were completed, you completed your training and you were in the F-4's, where did they send you to at that point?

Hale Burr: OK, at that time I was, you could get assignments in the F-4 here in the United States in Tactical Air Command, or you could go to Europe to the United States Air Forces in Europe flying F-4's, or you could go to what was called the Pipeline to Southeast Asia. I actually chose the Pipeline to Southeast Asia because I wanted to get into combat. The war was really starting to heat up at that time in Vietnam, and I wanted to get there as soon as possible.

So I knew from the time I received my assignment what I was going to go through, and the first thing I did was I had to go through some training at Davis Moffim Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona for a month or so, and then I had to go for three weeks to Fairchild Air Force Base in Washington state for survival training, and that was very intense. We did some academic work. We did a lot of physical training and then at the culmination of it was we went out about five days into the wilderness of Washington state. I was actually going through in late November, before Thanksgiving, and there was a lot of snow on the ground and so we were divided up into teams of about 6 or 8 people, and we had to survive for a few days, and we had to navigate through the wilderness to a certain point, and then we were captured and placed in a simulated prisoner of war camp where we went through a lot of harsh measures to see how we would hold up.

Is that the same Seer school?

Hale Burr: That is Seer school. And so it was really a big relief after not eating much and trekking through the mountains to get released from that POW camp after a couple of days. And we all went to town and had a big steak I remember. We were starved.

Yes sir.

Hale Burr: And then I went to MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Florida, and commenced my F-4 training.

And how much longer was it sir from then before you were deployed to Vietnam?

Hale Burr: Six months. It passed very fast.

Yes sir. What was your wife's thoughts about you volunteering to go?

Hale Burr: She I guess really didn't know what we were getting in for because I think many people had served in the war that we knew at the time. Some of the instructor pilots at MacDill where I was undergoing Air Force training had served tours in the war in 1965 and '66 and had returned to become instructor pilots in the F-4. But she really didn't know what I was getting in for.

Tell us then your memories of especially your first day of arriving in Vietnam.

Hale Burr: It was hot and humid. I was assigned to Cameron Bay Air Force Base on the coast and it was in the central part of South Vietnam. But before I got there, I left the states and we had to go to Clark Air Base in the Philippines and undergo a week of jungle survival training, and that was another interesting period, but I actually enjoyed it. It was a lot of academic work and a lot of work on parasailing and getting picked up by helicopters in case you were unlucky enough to get shot down and be rescued, you had to go through all that training. Then they sent us out a couple of days into the jungle and we had to use our escape and evasion techniques to try and get away from the indigenous Pilipino people called the Negritos, kind of short, pygmy type people and they found most of us. But the end of it was a helicopter came in and we popped flares and they dropped a cable and we got on the jungle penetrator and they flew us out of there. And then I flew into Saigon, into Tonsenut Air Force Base, and on a commercial charter and got on the C-130 and flew up to Cameron Bay and a bunch of people from the fighter squad I was

being assigned to meet me and drove me to our squadron area. But it was again, my first impressions were hot and humid. And this was in September of 1967.

What did most of the pilots in your squadron tell you about what to expect, or did they say much about it?

Hale Burr: Oh yes, we had a training program that we went through a lot of intelligence training and some more weapons training because we were getting ready to go on our missions and I would guess I started flying within three or four days. It was within the first week after my arrival after I got settled in. Our first missions were in South Vietnam, and Cameron was quite a ways from North Vietnam, so our squadron in our wing did not fly to North Vietnam very often, but we did fly up to Laos quite regularly. But most of the missions were conducted in South Vietnam in support of the United States Army and Marines.

Did you have much contact with enemy aircraft, or was that more exclusive to North Vietnam?

Hale Burr: Yes, that was all the air to air engagements were over North Vietnam and I never saw any aircraft until my second tour in Vietnam, but on my first tour I never saw any aircraft.

And how long was your first tour, sir?

Hale Burr: Well, it was one year but I spent six months at Cameron Bay and during the summer/fall of '67, it was a very intense year in the air war and we lost a lot of forward air controllers, and of course the United States was continuing to build up their forces in South Vietnam and they lost these forward air controllers and they needed them, so they came down and picked about 8 or 10 of us to be forward air controllers. So I went to Phanrang Air Base which was very close to Cameron Bay, and in one week I got checked out in the O-2 aircraft with about five rides and then I was sent up to Ikor, the northernmost part of South Vietnam to the 21st Forward Tactical Air Support Squadron, which operated the O-2 and O-1's that were flying in northern South Vietnam in Laos, and I was assigned to the 82nd Airborne Division, 3rd Brigade, which was located outside of the city of Huay, and we flew out of Huay, flew by, and we flew out of a runway there that was pretty small, south of the city of Huay, and I lived with the United States Army in a tent at a base called Camp Rodriguez, which was named after the first soldier in the 82nd Airborne that had been killed in Vietnam.

Tell us sir, a little bit about what your day-to-day duties consisted of at that point as a forward air controller.

Hale Burr: We spent most of our time flying. It was a small group. We had a major who was our air liaison officer, the ALO, and then we had five FAC's. I was the only lieutenant. The other four guys were captains. We rotated duties through the Army Tactical Operations Center on a weekly basis, and we flew the rest of the time in support of the 82nd Airborne. At that time, we were engaged in a lot of, this was after TET, 1968, and we were engaged in a lot of battles right outside the city of Huay, which the North Vietnamese had captured for some time before the Marines drove them out. And then we started progressively advancing towards Ashaw Valley which was out to the west on the border with Laos. The United States Army had been driven out of there in 1965, and so when we went back in the summer of '68, it was the first time any American forces had been there and so there were, it was a major trans-shipment point and infiltration point for the North Vietnamese coming into South Vietnam, and so we had a lot of big air battles out there and we progressively built fire bases that went to the west until they were

finally on the western perimeter of the valley and the mountains, and our 82nd Airborne troops were stationed in those and they were mostly artillery bases, and they fired support for the Army patrols that went out to engage the enemy. I really enjoyed that tour because I was flying by myself and I learned a lot about myself as a young lieutenant, being on your own and surviving somehow, and it was really a good feeling to support the Army, and they really appreciated the work that we forward air controllers did for them.

Did you encounter much anti-aircraft fire?

Hale Burr: Yes, quite a bit, but it was usually small arms fire, but occasionally heavy machine guns, and then once we started oh, I guess June and July of '68 into Ashaw Valley, there was a lot of anti-aircraft fire from 37 millimeter and 23 millimeter anti-aircraft guns that the North Vietnamese had in the valley.

How did that affect your missions or did it at all?

Hale Burr: Well yes, it affected it because the closer we got to the higher threat anti-aircraft weapons, the higher we were supposed to fly to try and keep out of their lethal range, but as forward air controllers we had to go down low a lot of times to see where the enemy was located and dug into bunkers and in the base camps, and then we had to really make sure when our troops got into a big fire fight that we knew where our forces were located and where we thought the enemy forces were located. So a lot of times you had to fly a lot lower to get an exact position before you would direct the fighters to attack the enemy, and we did that with, we had two pods of rockets and they were white phosphorous rockets, so when you fired them at a target, they hit the ground and exploded into a large, white plume of smoke, and then you would direct the attacking fighters, the U.S. Air Force or U.S. Marines or U.S. Navy fighters that you were controlling to attack some area relative to that white plume of smoke.

Was it difficult, sir, I would think to always be able to spot on the ground what was going on when you are flying an aircraft at such high speed or altitude?

Hale Burr: Well it wasn't that high speed. We would normally be travelling at about 120mph, so it was pretty low speed, but yeah, the higher up you are, the more difficult it is to distinguish things on the ground, but a lot of times we'd go down real low, to treetop level to get our eyes on what the target would be, and then we would climb back up and fire our marking rockets to mark the target.

So you did that for the last six months of your first tour?

Hale Burr: The last six months of my first tour, and then I came back to the States for a short time because I volunteered for a second tour in Vietnam. My wife and I, we lived, again, in Tampa, Florida for about six months and then I deployed back overseas again. This time I went to Udorn Royal Thai Air Force Base in Northern Thailand and I was a member of the 13th TAC fighter squadron at Udorn.

How did your wife, sir, feel about you returning so quickly?

Hale Burr: Well she was very anxious because in my first replacement training unit squadron that I attended in early 1967, we had 44 people and about half of those were shot down. Now most of them survived and were rescued, but about 25 percent were either killed in action or

missing in action, and so she knew a lot of these wives and widows, and so she was much more anxious about the second tour because we had known a lot of friends that didn't come back.

And how did that impact you, sir?

Hale Burr: I was just very eager to go back because I was really trained well and I had a lot of confidence in my training, and when you are in combat, the training just kicks in and you do things automatically and by instinct, so I felt very confident in my chances of surviving the tour. I mean that's what I'd been trained for all this time was to go into combat, so I was eager to do it.

So tell us then, sir, about your second tour there in Thailand.

Hale Burr: I arrived in May of 1969. Udorn was very close to Laos and the Mekong River separated Laos and Thailand, and eventually Cambodia and Vietnam, and so we were quite close to the combat activities in Laos which was kind of a secret war at that time. Not many people knew about it and it was not widely publicized, but most of my missions were over Laos, either northern Laos or southern Laos, because that was the main infiltration route that the North Vietnamese used to ship soldiers and supplies and war material down to the south, South Vietnam. So I did that for about four months, flying those missions. Occasionally we would fly over North Vietnam. What had happened was that President Johnson, when he decided not to run for reelection, had stopped bombing North Vietnam in 1968, and this bombing halt was still in effect when I arrived in 1969. But Udorn had two RF-4 reconnaissance squadrons and two F-4 fighter squadrons. They had the Triple Nickel, which was the very famous squadron flying out of Ubon that had shot down a lot of MIG's, and that squadron had been transferred from Ubon up to Udorn, and then the 13th Squadron was originally an F-105 squadron that was transferred to Udorn.

Had they phased out the F-105's?

Hale Burr: Yes, they had phased out the 105 and they were F-4D's. We were flying D models at this time, so this was the next generation F-4 Phantom. And after flying, and the way we flew, we would fly about a month of night missions and then we'd fly about a month of day missions, so the two squadrons were alternating day and night with most of the effort concentrated on one of those missions.

Would you fly, sir, pretty much every day?

Hale Burr: Not every day, but we flew at least every other day. And then after about four months, I was selected to go up to be a fast forward air controller in the F-4, and these F-4's did exactly the same thing that the O-2's that I flew in in Vietnam a year before did, in that they went out and they marked targets for other fighters to bomb and attack. So I really enjoyed that and we got to fly really low, usually below 500 feet, and usually always over 500 mph because we had to keep our speed up being that low because the defenses were really heavy in Laos and North Vietnam. I did that for a couple of months and then the lieutenant colonel that was in charge was transferred to Europe and as a young captain, I became the chief of the fast forward air control program at Udorn, so I was really lucky to be so young and to be in that position.

Yes sir. And at that point did you already know that you wanted to make a career out of the Air Force?

Hale Burr: Yes, I did. I had a real love affair with the Air Force. I liked the teamwork. I liked the discipline. I liked the military regimen. I really loved flying, and most of all I liked the people, so I really enjoyed it and I knew that I was going to stay in the Air Force. As a side note, two of the young captains that worked for me at that time, one was John Jumper who later became Air Force Chief of Staff, or General, and the other young captain was Dig Mires who became a four-star general and became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So we were really close as young officers flying combat and have remained friends ever since.

Wow, that's great. That definitely must feel like a small world to you in that sense that they had gone on and you went on to do such great things in the Air Force, and you started at friends at that time.

Hale Burr: Yes. So I did that for the last, I was head of the Fast FAC program the last four months of my tour at Udorn. Funny story, one of the majors who was my ALO in the O-2's in South Vietnam was now the Chief of Rated Assignments, and I wrote him a letter and told him I was coming up for reassignment and that I would like to go to Europe to Schusterberg. They had the F-4E which was the latest model of the F-4, but I got sent to Europe OK but I went to Hahn Air Force Base which was flying F-4C's and I was in the Weasel Squadron there. So when I departed my second tour in the Vietnam War, I had to go to Nellis Air Force Base for a month of Wild Weasel training, which were the anti-surface, the air missile and radar site attack mission. I did that and I was in the 81st Squadron at Hahn Air Force Base for one year. There my primary duties were as a scheduling officer. That squadron was probably the most highly experienced squadron I ever served in during my Air Force career because you had to have 1,000 hours of fighter time to be selected to be in Wild Weasel, and it was really rank heavy. We had a lieutenant colonel squadron commander, lieutenant colonel ops officer and assistant ops officer. We had four lieutenant colonels as flight commanders, and then after one year the squadron was moved to Zweibrücken Air Force Base which had just been reopened. It used to be a Canadian Air Base and the Canadians left it and the American Air Force took it over. The squadron transferred there, and we had one RF-4C reconnaissance squadron and one F-4C weasel squadron, and I was there for a year, and then I got asked to come up to the headquarters at Ramstein Air Force Base for my last two years where I was a member of the Standardization Evaluation Team for Europe for the last two years of my four-year tour in Europe in Germany.

Yes sir. Did you enjoy flying the F-4?

Hale Burr: Oh I loved it. A lot of people ask me, which airplane did you like the best? And I say well, I liked them all. The F-4 is, we called it double ugly, but it looked mean and it looked like a war fighting machine, and then when I got into the F-15 Eagle, it was like flying a Cadillac or a Mercedes Benz. It was very stable and very high tech, almost like a Star Wars machine. Then when I got into the F-16 Falcon, it was like flying a little sports car. So they all had their advantages and disadvantages, but I enjoyed 'em all.

I know it was interesting, too sir, with the F-4, that the Navy and the Marine Corps also flew that aircraft, which did you ever talk to anybody in the other services that also flew the F-4 about their experiences?

Hale Burr: Yes, they had quite a bit different experiences because the Navy primarily they spent a lot of their focus on being able to take off and land on the carriers, and some Marines flying do that. In the Marines, they were primarily, their F-4's were primarily focused on close air support in support of the Marine ground troops. But in the Air Force we did everything. We

did close air support, we did air to air combat, we did the wild weasel business, we did nuclear alert and practiced all kind of nuclear missions. That's a large part of what I did my first two years in Germany was hitting the nuclear alert. In fact we spent about a third of our time on alert and about a third of the time on temporary duty to Spain and Italy and Turkey because the weather was so bad in Germany we couldn't get all of our training squares accomplished flying in Germany so we had to go to the good weather places around the Mediterranean.

Tell us sir what that entailed being on nuclear alert.

Hale Burr: It was interesting, not much fun actually, but what we did, each F-4 crew had a target that they were assigned. When I set nuclear alert in West Germany, the targets were all in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. And I can remember one target in specific was the downtown main train station in Prague, Czechoslovakia. What we had to do, we had to study those targets and we would fly at low altitude into the target and drop a nuclear weapon. It was a B-61 which was a 10 kiloton nuclear weapon that we carried on our F-4's. Then we had to escape and come back and land, and of course some of the targets were in far eastern, East Germany, in Poland, and it was just you probably didn't have enough gas to get back, so it was kind of a one-way mission for some of those targets.

It would have been a doomsday scenario if you would have ever had to have flown that.

Hale Burr: And then we also set nuclear alert in Italy at Albion Air Base on occasion, and those targets were in Hungary, and as I remember, we set the targets out of Insurlake, Turkey, and those were in Southern Russia. But you would go on for three days, two or three days, and you were kept within a fenced compound. You could leave that compound where the weapons were secured on the airplanes and we had a lot of military police guarding the airplanes, and you could leave and you could go meet your family at the officer's club for lunch or dinner for example, and you could travel a little bit around the base, but you still had to be within five minutes of scrambling and takeoff. So we practiced that all the time and you had to study your target and then you'd have to get up and certify the target before a board of senior officers and they would ask you all kind of questions about the target and the weapons and the weather and all that. So it was a little intense, but it was kind of boring. We watched a lot of movies, played a lot of cards.

Yes sir. So tell us then sir, where you went to after that.

Hale Burr: I spent that last two years at Ramstein Air Base in the headquarters of the European Air Forces, and Standardization Evaluation, and my boss walked in one day and there were two of us had been promoted early to major, and there were two of us that were on the intermediate school's list. My boss walked in and said I've got some good news and bad news, and he spoke to the other officer and said Glen, the good news is you're going to Maxwell to the Air Force Command and Staff, and Hale, the bad news is you're going to Fort Leavenworth to the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. So my wife and I, we departed Germany and came back to Texas for a short time, and then drove up in July of 1974 to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. We just spent four years in Germany, and Kansas was one of the hottest places in the summer and it was one of the coldest places in the winter I'd ever been, a lot of snow and hail and sleet and ice and high winds during the winter. So it was much colder than the four years we had spent in Germany actually. But it was fun and it was a 1,000-officer school, about 900 were Americans and about 100 were foreign officers from militaries all over the world. In fact we a group of maybe 10 or 12 Vietnamese officers. Of course Saigon fell in 1975, and those officers

and their families at Fort Leavenworth were homeless. But there were only 14 of us Air Force officers attending that school, and we had great speakers and I enjoyed learning a lot about the Army.

Did you notice, sir, speaking of Vietnam and Saigon, did you notice a change in the overall morale in the Air Force and the service and military in general after that happened?

Hale Burr: Well, not so much with that happening, I mean that was a factor, but there were a lot of factors that affected morale in the Air Force. One of the main ones was that we were not trained as well as we should be because we didn't get enough flying time in those years. They were constantly cutting the budgets in the Air Force, and so we had a lot of supply and spare parts problems in the late 70s, mid to late 70s, and it really got worse during the President Carter administration, and at that time we had what we called the hollow Army. There were just not enough funds to do realistic training, and so it wasn't until President Reagan got elected in 1980 that we really started getting large infusions of money to build up our Air Forces and our military in general, and we started getting pay raises. We hadn't gotten pay raises in a long time, and so morale went up traumatically in the 1980s.

That seems to fit with everything I've always heard and read, sir, but I was just curious what your take was.

Hale Burr: It was very true. I mean pilots want to fly, and when you have to sit around on the ground looking for make work jobs to keep busy, and you're not flying and not training to do what you're supposed to do, morale suffers.

Was there any, I imagine, too, recruitment by airlines to become an air pilot?

Hale Burr: That was a major issue. The airlines were hiring a lot of pilots in the 1970s, and so we had retention problems in the Air Force, and a lot of people would leave after one tour in the Air Force and go fly for the airlines instead of staying. But the ones who stayed were really hard core and patriotic and fun to be around.

And so you stayed, and then throughout the 80s, I imagine there was just for you a steady progression up the ranks because you get to Major General, that's not something that everybody gets to. Tell us a little bit about that, sir, because I know that's difficult to do.

Hale Burr: OK, I left Fort Leavenworth in the summer of 1975 and was assigned to the Pentagon. I was assigned to Europe NATO plans and policy and the Director of plans in the air staff, and I did that for three years. So I traveled to Europe a lot and I worked mostly European political issues. Then in 1978, I got a boondoggle. I was tired of being in the Pentagon. I didn't like it, and I volunteered for an Air Force Research Associate program, and every year the Air Force selected about 15 or 20 officers to go to various universities and spend one academic year, and I got sent to the University of Miami in Carl Gables, Florida, to the Center for Advanced International Studies. During that year, I was fully involved in the academic world. I did some research, wrote a couple of papers that were published in Air University Review, and I taught graduate level courses, masters degree courses, and one was on American defense policy and the other one was on contemporary military political problems. I did that for a year, and I trained for the large boat marathon. I did a lot of running and so I was in really good shape then, but coming out of that year in the academic world I got another academic tour because I was selected to go to the National War College at Fort MacNair in Washington, D.C. So I spent that year and

I really enjoyed that year. It was really challenging and interesting and we had all the best speakers from the President on down and all the cabinet members and all the senior military people would come and talk to the National War College, but we had a lot of free time. We had two hours off for lunch every day, so I trained for the Marine Corps marathon, and I ran the Marine Corps marathon in Washington, D.C. during that year, and we played a lot of sports. We played softball and we played soccer and good things like that. So it was a good healthy year, and we spent a lot of times with our family because especially after the Pentagon tour where you worked such long hours and worked weekends, but that tour in the National War College was really enjoyable. I got to spend a lot of time with my two daughters and my wife.

Yes sir, then tell us sir, at what point did you think there was a possibility that you would get General? I know in a lot of services that's far from being close to anything automatic.

Hale Burr: Yeah, first of all, life is not fair and there's a lot of great officers that never get promoted to General, and you have to fill the right positions normally and be successful in those. Some offices fill all the right jobs but they're unlucky and they have things happen to them during their tour as a commander that keeps them from advancing any higher. I came out of National War College in 1980, as a Lieutenant Colonel still, and was assigned to the F-15 at Langley Air Force Base Virginia. I reported in and the wing commander had been my boss when I was in Europe on the Stan Navall team, so he knew me and he wanted me to come work for him. So I got my wife and children settled in Pikosen. We were living off base. And I went to Luke Air Force Base for two months to check out the F-15. During that time, Langley underwent an ORI, an Operational Readiness Inspection, and they busted it big time. This was at the end of the Carter presidency. And the wing didn't have any parts and they had to cannibalize parts off of other airplanes to keep some airplanes flying, and so they failed miserably. Well unfortunately, my friend, the wing commander, got fired. So I came back from Luke and he was gone. I walked in and the Director of Operations who I'd known in the Pentagon, we both worked in Europe NATO plans and policy, he told me to go down to the 94th Squadron and get combat ready. When I left his office, I ran into the wing commander who I did not know and he did not know me, but I imagine my friend the former wing commander told him about me, and he was very outgoing and he congratulated me on coming back and I went down to 94th for a couple of months, and became combat ready in the F-15. Then I went straight from there to be the squadron commander of the 71st Tactical Fighter Squadron at Langley. So I did that for two years and I got promoted to Colonel, and I went up to the USAFE inspector general team. So I was the Operations Chief on the IG team at Langley, and we went and conducted all of the ORI's and NEI's in Tactical Air Command. I had been there about six months and my two star boss, the IG, walked in, and what had transpired was that General Creech, the Commander of TAC at the time, had selected me to go to Randolph Air Force Base to the Air Force military personnel center and be the head of rated assignments. So I would be responsible for all of the assignments that pilots and navigators got selected for. So I thought we were coming back to Texas. Well, General Violet walked in and said hell, I know that General Creech wants you to go to Randolph, but we just had to fire the DO out at Holloman Air Force Base, and we need a Colonel to go out there who is combat ready in the F-15, and I said General, I'll do whatever the Air Force wants me to do, but I came in to fly airplanes and I'd like to go to Holloman. So I left immediately and we packed up and went to Holloman where I was the Director of Operations for two years of the 49th Tactical Fighter Wing at Holloman. I then left Holloman and went to Tendell Air Force Base and I was the Vice Commander for a couple of months and I moved up to be the Wing Commander at Tendell of an F-15 wing, and they had two F-15 squadrons that were replacement training units, RTU's. They trained the young pilots who were just coming in to the F-15. I had one T-33 squadron which were targets for interceptors, but it was a huge squadron. It had like 42

airplanes and about 60 pilots. So what I did, as Wing Commander, I flew two F-15 missions a week and I was a fully qualified instructor pilot in the F-15, and then I flew one mission a week in the T-33. I did that for 18 months and I really enjoyed Tendell, my family like it, and one day I got a phone call that General Kirk, the 9th Air Force Commander, was coming, flying into the base unannounced, and I went down to the flight line and met him and he said Hale, let's drive down to flatlands. So he got in my staff car and he told me that he had decided to fire a friend of mine who was the Commander at Homestead Air Base in Miami, Florida, and that he wanted me to go down there and take over that F-16 wing. I said, General Kirk, I'll do whatever the Air Force wants. So on very short notice, about two days, I went down to Homestead and had a change of command ceremony. I then went back to McNeil Air Force Base for a week and got a quick checkout of the F-16, and came back and was the Wing Commander at Homestead for the next two years. At that time, I did not have a joint assignment, and in the late 80s, there was the Goldwater Nichols Act which said that to become a General Officer you had to have joint duty. I was assigned back to McNeil Air Force Base at the completion of my two years at Homestead to Central Command. I went there and I was the Director of Security Assistance, the J-47. I was a Colonel working for a two star Army general for about six months, and General Schwarzkopf was the Commander, and one afternoon about 5:30 I got a call in my office to report to General Schwarzkopf's office immediately. So I went down there and walked in and he said congratulations Hale, you've just been, Larry Welch, the Chief of Staff of the Air Force called me and you've been selected for Brigadier General. So I've got a lot of Schwarzkopf stories. He's a great guy in my book. So after I got that promotion, I got sent to Bahrain to be the Deputy Commander as a one star of the Middle East Joint Taskforce. My boss was a two star Navy Admiral. I lived on board the USS LaSalle, which was home ported in Bahrain. I lived on board the ship. My boss, Admiral Fogarty, lived in a big villa in downtown Bahrain. We spent about 60 percent of our time at sea, but it was just a six-month temporary duty assignment.

What year was that, sir?

Hale Burr: That was 1989-1990.

So we're kind of leading up to the Gulf War then.

Hale Burr: That's right. So what happened, I got that experience in the Middle East and traveled to all the, I'd been traveling to all the countries as the Director of Security Assistance in the Middle East during 1988-89, and I spent six months on board the ship on temporary duty, and I got reassigned to the Pentagon to the joint staff as the Deputy Director for Operations in J3. So my immediate boss was a three star Army General named Tom Kelly, and during that time I briefed Colin Powell who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Dick Cheney on a regular basis. I was actually on duty when the Iraqis invaded Kuwait, and I'm the guy that called Colin Powell and Dick Cheney to let them know what had happened. Now we actually knew that it was going to happen about 48 hours in advance. Our intelligence agencies predicted it. So within about 15 or 20 minutes, the Pentagon was full of generals and high ranking civilians when the invasion occurred. Then I worked steadily from the 2nd of August every day until the end of March of 1990. So I was involved in all of the Desert Shield activities which was the deployment of forces over to Saudi Arabia and the other places in the Middle East, and then when the war kicked off from mid-January of 1990, I was sitting at the same table with Dick Cheney and Colin Powell and we were watching CNN when Bernard Shaw, the CNN reporter and the lights went out in downtown Baghdad when the bombs started falling. So that was a very intense time for the next month or so, month and a half while the war lasted. One of the highlights of that was that General Powell selected me to brief Congress, so I went over twice a week to brief the full

Senate and the full House and bring them up to date on what was going on in the war. It was a unique experience and the Senators were all gentlemen and very courteous, and in the Senate classified briefing room, they had to sign in when they came in and the order they signed in was the order they could ask questions. When you go into the House, it was like an unruly mob. They were yelling questions and demanding answers and things, quite a contrast to the nice reception, civil reception I got in the Senate every time I went. And then the things that we would brief them on were classified, and we'd walk out of the House and there you'd see Congressmen talking to TV and news reporters telling them just what we had briefed them on.

Yeah, probably the most dangerous place is between a politician and a camera.

Hale Burr: Yes exactly, that's a good description. But during that time working, I got promoted to two stars, and the list was released and General Powell called me at home to congratulate me, and also General Schwarzkopf called me to congratulate me. I got reassigned to 13th Air Force at Guam as the Commander. Now what had happened was 13th Air Force had been at Clark Air Base in the Philippines for many years. Six months before, Mount Pinatubo had erupted and covered the base in ash, and all the families were evacuated, and so the previous 13th Air Force Commander and his staff lived in ash for about six months. So my wife and I flew in to Guam. He flew in from the Philippines as the four star PAC AF Commander, conducted a change of command ceremony, and the former commander got on the four star's airplane and they flew back to Hawaii and he flew back to an assignment in the United States, and I was the Commander of the 13th Air Force and I had exactly six people to start the Air Force headquarters there because the people that had been in the Philippines did not have retainability and did not have to choose a consecutive overseas tour, and so most of them went back to the United States. So I started out with a very small staff and eventually built it up to about 100 people.

Well sir, we're almost out of time. I know it's taken about an hour and I appreciate you sharing that hour with us to record some of these things, because here at the Land Office we have archives that go back to the Spanish Land Grant days. We have the land grant that David Crockett's widow received after he was killed at the Alamo, and we have Stephen F. Austin's original Registro, and that sort of thing, and our intent with these interviews is to record these for posterity so future generations, potentially even hundreds of years from now can listen to these and perhaps learn something, and with that in mind, I was wondering sir if there was anything you might want to say to anyone listening to this interview, perhaps decades from now.

Hale Burr: I guess the impression and perspective that I'd like to leave with someone listening to this is that, and I say this to young people all the time when I'm talking to them either individually or in groups, that I can't think of anything I'd rather have done with my life than be in the United States Air Force and be a fighter pilot. You can do a lot of things, you can have a lot of different careers, you can make a lot of money, or whatever motivates you, but being in the Air Force and being a fighter pilot was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed the military life. I really enjoyed the teamwork and the regimen and the discipline and all aspects of it, but most of all I enjoyed the people in the Air Force. They are just great people and you just can't beat 'em.

Yes sir. Well sir, thank you again very much for letting us interview you and on behalf of Commissioner Patterson and everyone here at the General Land Office, we just want to thank you for your service to our nation. It's just one small way of saying thank you and in a matter of weeks or so we'll be sending you copies of this interview on CD as well, and also if there's any photographs or anything like that you would want us to potentially put on our web site or put in your file, please let me know and we can arrange to make copies of those and that sort of thing.

Hale Burr: Well listen, I want to thank you for your time and thanks for this opportunity. I think this is really a noble project and I hope you all have great success in getting a lot of veterans to contribute.

Well if you know anyone sir that wants to be interviewed, just have them give me a call. That's how we find a lot of veterans is through word of mouth.

Hale Burr: I certainly will.

Yes sir, well thank you very much sir.

Hale Burr: Thank you.

[End of recording]